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Mount Rainier National Park News Release

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Trail Damage Emerges as Snow Melts

April 12--Since torrents of rain water swept through the park in early November, park officials have been busy tallying up the damage and making repairs. Roads, utilities, campgrounds and buildings all suffered in the storm. But one of the big unknowns remaining in flood recovery is the status of backcountry trails. The full extent of damage to trails, bridges, and campsites is only now beginning to become clear.

The November flood took out many backcountry bridges and damaged trails along river valleys. Two sections of the Wonderland Trail, a famous 93-mile loop of the mountain, will be unusable this year. On the Carbon Glacier Trail just upstream from the Lake James junction the Carbon River scoured away the trail and the base of the hill, leaving nearly vertical scree and bedrock. Repair will require a 1,500-foot reroute 50-100 feet above the original trail. During construction hikers will be rerouted across the Carbon River at the Lake James crossing then south along the Northern Loop Trail to the Carbon Glacier.

An earth slide in Stevens Canyon created a steep and unstable slope. The Wonderland Trail will have to be rerouted for 1,000 feet to bypass the slide scar. Until the trail is fixed Wonderland Trail hikers will have to walk along the Stevens Canyon Road for about four miles.

“Those planning their ‘once in a lifetime’ trip on the Wonderland Trail might want to postpone the experience until next year,” said park spokesperson Lee Taylor.

Trail crews recently discovered that a crucial trail to access the Emmons Glacier climbing route is also in bad shape. The Glacier Basin Trail was washed away by the flood and may be unusable this summer. “This is just the first of what will probably be many areas of damage we discover as the snow melts,” said Taylor.

With so many backcountry bridges out stream crossings will be an important safety concern this summer. Hikers can take these precautions to cross streams safely:

- Whether you’re going to cross on a log, step from rock to rock, or wade, choose your spot carefully. Find an area where the water is slow and shallow. Look downstream: if you see logs or other debris that could trap you if you fall in, find a different place to cross.
- Carefully assess the depth and speed of the water before deciding to walk across. If the water is up to your knees it’s too deep to ford. Drop in a stick and walk alongside it. If you can’t keep up, the water is too fast to wade.

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- Use a sturdy stick for balance while crossing. Always keep two points of contact on the ground. If you can't see the bottom, probe with the stick before each step.
- On log crossings staring down at the water can make you dizzy; try to keep your eyes forward as much as possible. And select a log that isn't too slippery! If the log is stripped of bark or wet it's likely to be slick.
- When you're ready to cross unfasten the belt of your pack so you can ditch it quickly if you end up in the water.
- If you do fall in, try to point your feet downstream and keep your head up.
- Never jump in to help another person—it's highly unlikely you'll be able to offer any aid in the fast, cold water. Instead keep the person in sight and follow on the bank until you can safely attempt a rescue.
- Use good judgment—if you have any doubts at all about the safety of a crossing, don't do it! You can always go back the way you came.

“This summer it will be critical for visitors to get current information on trail conditions,” said Taylor. “Stop in at any visitor center or Wilderness Information Center for assistance.” Updated information and trail conditions are posted on the park's web page at www.nps.gov/mora or call 360-569-HIKE.

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